**2022 Nature Camp on Kelleys Island**

**Jackie Taylor, Kelleys Island Field Station, Director**

This year the Nature Camp theme was “Wonders of Water.” Water is the thread that connects us all, especially on an island surrounded by it! Campers ages 4-14 years old investigated the ecology of Lake Erie, which is home to many microscopic and large animals. They explored for animals who depend on the lake for food, they got up-close and hands-on learning experiences through water exploration, fish dissection, kayaking, and more!

  One of the most interesting parts of my job is directing the Nature Camp program. I enjoy Nature Camp because I get to reconnect with families who return to the program and meet families new to the program and island, spend time with great co-workers and volunteers, and to be outside in the natural world making a difference.

Being a Nature Camp Counselor, I have come to learn that the weeks fly by even faster. I have a routine each day and I see Friday faster by the week. When the last day of the last week arrives, "I leave camp, but camp does not leave me." We create many memories that we will always remember each summer whether you return the next summer or not. After camp every year I look back at the weeks and think about everything we did, that happened, and how much I learned about myself. At camp we all have relatable camp counselor moments, so I compiled a list of my favorites. Enjoy!

 **“You know you are a Kelleys Island Nature Camp Counselor when...”**

* You have a greater appreciation for the weather.
* Your tan lines are hideous. (Watch, chacos/shoes, shorts, shirt...)
* You would rather sleep than shower.
* You have a set of camp clothes and a set of “normal” clothes.
* Your friends and family do not expect to see or hear from you during camp.
* You save everything campers make for you.
* You make new friends in your field, and you stay connected with them for years.
* You get to be a role model and make differences.
* You learn so much about yourself.
* You meet new families and see returning families on the Island who are always so thankful and happy to come to camp each day. We would not have such a great camp without the families and friends who come to the Nature Camp program. Thank you for being so much fun!
* You have the support of the Kelleys Island Community! Thank you to The Kelleys Island General Store (camp shirts), The Kelleys Island Audubon Club (camp bags), The Kelleys Island School-Administration and school board (support of the camp program), Erie Metroparks (kayaking), The Kelleys Island Chamber of Commerce (support of the camp program), and The Ohio Geological Survey (programming). The in-kind support goes a long way towards camp supplies and travel to and from the island.
* You have the opportunity to work with Jodie Smith, Isabell Smith, Amy Dailey, Beck Miller, Emily Beal, Chris Ashley, and Marie and Brian Osborn. Camp would not be what it is without the support and help of these people. The mental and physical energy they provided each day was outstanding. They kept things fun while still being helpful assets to the program. I cannot thank this crew enough!

  The Nature Camp mission is to “Encourage Children’s Natural Curiosity of the Outdoors by Engaging Them in Fun and Educational Activities.” I am thankful for the support and assistance we receive in teaching kids about the beautiful islands they live and play on! For the 80 plus kids who participated in Nature Camp, and 183 volunteer hours at camp I am so grateful. We are excited for Nature Camp 2023!